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NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE; NEA/IPA FOR  
WILLIAMS/GREENE/LOGERFO/WAECHTER; NSC FOR ABRAMS, DORAN,  
MUSTAFA

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SUBJECT: OCHA REPORTS ON DIFFICULTIES PALESTINIAN FARMERS  
FACE TRYING TO ACCESS LAND IN SEAM ZONE

¶1. (SBU) Summary: In a March 1 briefing to diplomats, UN OCHA head David Shearer said Palestinian farmers continued to face difficulties reaching their land in the "seam-zone" -the West Bank area lying between the separation barrier and the Green Line. The difficulties centered on a restrictive permit regime and the restrictive system of access gates.  
End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) According to Shearer, more permit requests are being rejected on grounds related to property ownership rather than security. In the Qalqilya governorate, he noted, land-related issues constituted 11 percent of the permit rejections in January 2005, while by July 2005 that number had risen to 65 percent. According to OCHA, permit refusals centered on:

-- insufficient proof of first-degree relationship (either through a tax document or registration form) to the land owner, so most of those rejected for permits included tenant farmers, laborers, spouses, and second-degree relatives and

-- insufficient proof of land ownership west of the security barrier. Shearer noted that an amended military order in December 2005 required additional documentation to prove title to land and to receive a permit. Partly due to a lack of access to resources, including official Israeli maps, especially in Area C, which is under full Israeli civil and military control, land owners have had difficulty fulfilling this new requirement.

-- Under Israeli law, farmers risk dispossession if they do not cultivate their land in three consecutive years. Such land can be declared state land.

¶3. (SBU) Shearer also highlighted what he said were erratic schedules for entry through the agricultural gates in the separation barriers, which preclude Palestinian farmers from regularly reaching agricultural land in the closed areas, even if they have a permit. Out of 42 gates in the Tulkarm, Qalqilya, and Salfit governorates, 21 were open (with restricted access), five were seasonal (with restricted access), and 16 were closed completely. Shearer described the gates as open only for specific periods of time, between 20 minutes to one hour, three times a day. Even if a farmer only needs to work a field for one or two hours, he often must wait several more hours in order to get back through the gate when it reopens.

¶4. (SBU) Shearer described reports of farmers traveling

double or triple the distance to reach their land in closed areas due to permits specifying the use of certain gates. The permits also do not give the farmer permission to cross with tractors or other farm vehicles. He noted that some permits have listed the wrong gate number, forcing the farmer to travel even further. Shearer also described cases of IDF soldiers destroying a one-year permit and the Israeli DCL refusing to reissue a replacement permit on the grounds that a permit had already been issued.

WALLES